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News Releases



FEBRUARY 11, 2013 SAVANNAH, GA

13 additional defendants charged in Operation Dark Night

SAVANNAH, Ga. – A superseding indictment, returned Thursday in federal court, has added 13 more defendants for their roles in an alleged sex trafficking and prostitution ring operating in Mexico, Florida, Georgia, the Carolinas and elsewhere. In total, 25 defendants have now been charged in the superseding indictment, which follows the original 12-defendant indictment returned in January.

The federal charges follow a lengthy investigation dubbed "Operation Dark Night," led by U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement's (ICE) Homeland Security Investigations (HSI). In addition to the 12 arrests and nearly 20 search warrants executed in January, federal authorities rescued 11 women alleged to have been forced into prostitution. The investigation of this case remains ongoing.

United States Attorney Edward Tarver said, "The superseding indictment adds even more gruesome details to the allegations of an already reprehensible human trafficking ring operating within our very own communities. The U.S. Attorney's Office and our law enforcement partners will not stop until all of those responsible are brought to justice."

"The superseding indictment alleges that this sex trafficking ring was even more extensive and ruthless," said Brock D. Nicholson, special agent in charge of HSI Atlanta. "Over a dozen new suspects, including 'johns,' have now been added. Of more concern are new allegations that members of this conspiracy arranged to hold some of their victims' children hostage in Mexico to ensure their compliance as prostitutes in the United States. The investigation in Operation Dark Night will continue until we have rooted out all of the bad actors in this conspiracy and have brought them to justice."

According to allegations in the superseding indictment, some of the defendants would entice women from Mexico and elsewhere to travel to the United States with false promises of the American dream. Once inside the United States, these women were allegedly threatened and forced to commit acts of prostitution at numerous locations in Savannah, Ga., and throughout the southeast. Women were alleged to have been forced to perform as many as 25 acts of prostitution a day.

Tarver stressed that an indictment is only an accusation and is not evidence of guilt. The defendants are entitled to a fair trial, during which it will be the government's burden to prove the defendants' guilt beyond a reasonable doubt.

HSI provides relief to victims of human trafficking by allowing for their continued presence in the United States during criminal proceedings. Victims may also qualify for a T-visa, which is issued to victims of human trafficking who have complied with reasonable requests for assistance in investigations and prosecutions. Anyone who suspects instances of human trafficking is encouraged to call the HSI tip line at 1-866-DHS-2-ICE (866-347-2423) or the Human Trafficking Hotline at 1-888-373-7888. Anonymous calls are welcome.

Operation Dark Night was led by HSI, with assistance from the FBI; the ATF; U.S. Customs and Border Protection (CBP); CBP Air and Marine Operations; Coast Guard Investigative Service (CGIS); IRS-Criminal Investigations; the Savannah-Chatham Metropolitan Police Department; the Chatham County Sheriff's Office; the Garden City Police Department; and, the Chatham County Counter Narcotics Team.

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U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) is the largest investigative arm of the Department of Homeland Security.

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